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ABSTRACT

Educational curricula have often been shaped more by worldwide standards and modern values than by national or regional influences and may, in some cases, be irrelevant to student and local community needs. This paper explores ways in which curricula can be adapted to a region's specific, social, political, and regional conditions. It begins with a review of the literature on the philosophical context and process of adapting curricula, and then examines several case studies illustrating local community input into curriculum development. These include the introduction of western education into societies in Africa; the Balochistan Instructional Materials Development and Training Cells (BIMDTC) project to produce primary-level curriculum materials in Pakistan; and the Gonoshahajjo Sangstha, a non-governmental organization in Bangladesh, established to facilitate the social mobilization of the poor through literacy and education. The paper concludes with a discussion of strategic approaches to school reform, including local input regarding education reform and school clusters. (Contains 31 references.) (ND)

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Community-led Initiatives in Curriculum Development

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Introduction

In this paper I will consider the importance of community-led initiatives in designing curricula. Over time, curricular patterns throughout the world have come to look more and more alike. The "coincidence" of similar curricula is often explained by the existence of educational models within the institutional perspective. Should we allow education to become simply a model which nation-states imitate? Or is there room for individual country characteristics in the formation of curricula? I believe there may be costs to curricular isomorphism and that local input should be encouraged so as to promote more country and regional specific curricula.

Globalization of Curriculum

It has been suggested that educational curricula are closely related to the expansion of the world-system and the increasing dominance of certain models in education curricula (Meyer, Kamens, and Benavot, 1992). "Education has increasingly become part of a transcultural framework giving little adherence to local input" (Ramirez, 1992). The notion of a world curricula has resulted from the formation of two ideas. First, world models of society have begun to standardize around the nation-state principle. Second, less developed countries are often expected to imitate the educational institutions of more successful nations. Since mass education is closely linked to the goals of national development, it has become a model for society. Educational curricula have been shaped more by worldwide standards and modern values than by national or regional influences. The institutional perspective explains this process of curricular isomorphism. There is an adherence to the norms or recipes of the more successful organizations. It is proposed that the content of school curricula is closely linked to the rise of dominant models which generate increasingly similar educational patterns around the world (Benavot et al, 1991).

These bodies of knowledge are encouraged by international organizations, professional elites, and by dominant powers throughout the world. For example, the

United Nations often expects a nation-state to have an educational plan. To some extent, the mass curriculum is directly prescribed by the influence of international organizations such as the World Bank and various UN organizations. Such groups find nation-states eager for national progress and legitimacy within the world-system. Therefore, legitimacy in the modern world-system is achieved through conformity to the institutionalized ideals. It would follow that national differences in curricular emphases would show little consistency over time because all national systems are derived from prevailing world conventions (Meyer and Ramirez, 1992). Increasingly, curricula is developed with a universal and worldwide character rather than a local one.

This relative homogeneity of the world's primary curricula and transitional trend toward educational standardization has been found by Benavot et al (1991) and Meyer and Kamens (1992). Instruction in core subjects appear in almost all national curricula and there are many similarities in the importance given to these core categories. For much of the twentieth century, a standard world curriculum has been allocated the most instructional time. On average, approximately 35% of instructional time is granted to the acquisition of language skills, 18% is devoted to mathematics, and the majority of the time remaining is allocated to science, social studies, and the arts, each of which are given equal weights of 8% (Fordham, 1992). Despite these commonalties of official curricula, the actual implemented curricula varies considerably across nations. Decoupling between national policy and classroom practice can be expected in all nations and particularly in the Third World due to lack of resources (Meyer and Kamens, 1992).

Curricula developed at a national center or outside a country altogether are often irrelevant to student needs with respect to language issues, the inappropriateness of illustrations and content in textbooks, and the form of pedagogy. However, there is also the danger of advocating a closed educational system which effectively cuts off a community from national and international knowledge, progress, and development (Haggis, 1991). This paper will consider the importance of community-led initiatives in

designing curricula. World models must be adapted in ways which are specific to a country's social, political, and regional conditions.

Philosophical Context

Freire (1973) explains education as "an act of transferring knowledge because one's ideology determines one's epistemology." Since the seventeenth century epistemology has been a fundamental theme of philosophers who sought to determine the origins, sources, and grounds of knowledge. Rene Descartes and other philosophers of the rationalism position believed in the existence of innate ideas as well as ideas from experience. Later, philosophers such as John Locke, David Hume, and John Stuart Mill opposed this view by denying the existence of innate ideas. John Dewey explains knowledge as arising in the functional relationship between a person and his or her perceived environment. His commitment to pragmatism holds that methods of perceiving, obtaining, and validating data is derived from sensory experience. Dewey explains that the perceptions of an individual are derived from his or her history and experience. He contends that it is the responsibility of the educational system to have a clear understanding of the needs and capacities of students (Dewey, 1938). The scaffolding of schooling should structure problems and set cues at appropriate levels for children so they do not get discouraged and are able to achieve success. Problems are developed around situations within a framework, and in the pursuit or the resolution of the problem, an end emerges. For example, when a meaningful opportunity for learning emerges during the course of teaching, a teacher should take advantage of that situation. This course of action encourages new opportunities to emerge and provides active learning for the student and a way for students to become reflective of their experiences.

Freire (1973) contends that the educator does not posses knowledge in a complete form and, therefore, knowledge is not a fact but a process. It is a process in which knowing implies transforming actions into a theoretical account of those actions. Freire

explains that people have knowledge because they are in a dialectic relationship with reality (Freire, 1973). He explains that in the case of formerly colonized countries, people must be challenged to overcome the myth of their inferiority by realizing that they are valuable in their own right. "They may not know they are creating art when they play on the drums, dance, or express themselves in the world. They are in a culture of silence...unable to realize that they are artists" (Freire, 1973). The dependent society is shaped by the values and lifestyles of the dominator. Thereby, the opinions of reality must be replaced by the logic of reality. The nature and function of truly liberating education is the notion of one's existence in the world with others (Freire, 1985). Man has the ability to simultaneously transform the world by his or her actions and communicate the world's reality through language. The union of action and reflection, is only possible when an objective-subjective dialog is maintained. "Conscientization is the effort to enlighten man about the obstacles preventing him from a clear perception of reality" (Freire, 1985).

Curriculum Defined

According to Eisner (1994), curriculum development is "the process of transforming images and aspirations about education into programs that will effectively realize the visions that initiated the process." Curriculum is a representation of ideas and experiential knowledge, and the dialog between actors and material. Educational knowledge refers to these underlying principles which shape the curriculum and pedagogy. Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, while pedagogy defines what counts as the valid transmission of knowledge (Bernstein, 1971). The formation of these codes into curriculum depends upon the social characteristics of a country or region which regulate the framing of this knowledge into public educational institutions (Bernstein, 1971). The representation of knowledge should incorporate a student's background and cultural experience. A prescription of a curricula agenda may have implications for

opportunity. For example, a student who has an aptitude for painting, but that experience is denied, he or she will be robbed of the chance to experience success through that medium.

The consideration of whether the content of a curriculum is relevant and meaningful to the students for whom it is intended is an important aspect of curriculum development. Dewey (1938) sees diversity as inevitable, a student's cultural background is always relevant. The teacher must determine the appropriate scaffolding so that the child will have a successful experience. Multicultural education helps students develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to function in a pluralist society and to participate in reflective action (Banks, 1993). Regional and cultural biases influence one's interpretation of problems in education. Positionality reveals the important aspects of one's identity and their frame of reference for particular issues. Banks (1993) explains that concepts, explanations, and interpretations that students derive from personal experiences with their families and community constitute personal and cultural knowledge. Teachers are challenged to incorporate the students' personal and cultural knowledge in a way to motivate and help them understand the facts, concepts, generalizations, and interpretations that are present in textbooks and other curricular material.

How something is shaped pedagogically, influences the subject itself. Therefore, the way you form content is also part of that content. "Students should be given opportunities to investigate and determine how cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and the biases within a discipline influence the ways knowledge is constructed" (Banks, 1993). Given that a child's experience shapes the way he or she perceives the world, the adaptability of a curriculum can be increased by providing different ways to contextualize the material. For example, the information that children living in a rural area find meaningful may differ considerably from the material inner-city children find meaningful (Eisner, 1994). While teaching on a Jicarilla Apache reservation I realized that much of what I understood from having lived in largely populated areas on the East coast, was not comprehensible to my students. They could not envision high rise buildings and

the multitudes of people and cars, because they were used to a rural ranching lifestyle. I helped them understand other parts of the country and world by providing photographs, showing filmstrips, reading folk tales, writing pen pals, and engaging them in various styles of art. I also helped them understand their social environment by inviting community members, such as foresters, to the class to speak about their professions. The use of multiple forms of representation by teachers provides access into dimensions of understanding. "The ability to use one or more forms of representation is not only a function of opportunities for students to acquire the necessary skills; it is also related to the aptitudes and proclivities that they possess" (Eisner, 1994). Elizabeth Cohen's work with complex instruction is an example of a form of instruction which calls for different kinds of intellectual skills and appreciates the differences in children's aptitudes. The pedagogical task is to help students understand the meaning of a concept by providing an appropriate way of envisioning it (Eisner, 1994).

Adaptation of Curricula

The factors that vary among countries appear to have little impact in shaping curricula. Contrariwise, curricular patterns tend to parallel each other and reveal the powerful influences of the world ideology. National elites often devise their national curricular policy from models their consultants are able to find. Developing unique and local alternatives is often a more difficult task. The ideology of local control acknowledges the diversity of educational systems while there are homogenizing forces at the state and federal levels. There are often implications to using instructional materials developed outside a local culture. The cultural relevance model (Jansen, 1991), explains the lack of "fit" between the assumptions of the imported or imposed curriculum models and the cultural factors of the local context. This is overcome by ensuring that the school curriculum is representative of the concerns of the planners, community, teachers and students. The importance of cultural explanations is that they alert planners of the variety

of ways curriculum is perceived across societal cultures. "Cultural theorists have demonstrated that curricula which derive their epistemological content from the local cultural contexts are more compatible with the learning styles and progress of students living in those localities" (Jansen, 1991). A curriculum specialist would ideally help teachers create materials they need to adapt the content of the curricula to meet local concerns.

The Situation in Many African Nations

I will now take the case of Africa to explain the need for cultural and regional adaptation of curricula. A radical view states that "Western education as taught by missionaries was a kind of training for subservience and humility. It also emphasized the superiority of Western culture" (Gitau, 1988). This view maintains that Western values and forms of education should be renounced wholesale. In line with the thoughts of Freire, there is a vision of what African education could be transformed into, so that it could be an instrument of liberation rather than of oppression. In order to become conscious of and able to act upon reality, one must develop the capacity to gain an 'objective distance' from the world (Amukugo, 1993). There is a need for qualitative research in the field of curriculum development to constantly review and develop in order to meet the needs of a changing society. The interaction between 'traditional' (the education system existing prior to the coming of European missionaries) and modern learning systems is a major issue in African countries (Haggis, 1991).

Western education was introduced into societies in Africa which already had their own distinct educational systems. The traditional community objective of preparing every child for full participation in society is at odds with the Western policy of identifying an elite for a limited number of positions (Adams, 1985). In traditional African education, the learning process was directly related to specific work in a particular society and was relevant to the African society in which it functioned. There was no distinction between

intellectual education and productive activity. According to Amukugo (1993), education was relevant to African society in the following respects: its close link with social life, both in terms of materially and spiritually, its collective nature, and its accordance with the successive stages of physical, emotional, and mental development of the child. The curriculum was composed of activities and experiences, both formal and informal, which were transmitted to each child (Salia-Bao, 1989). The informal education took place by learning through observing and following the examples of the elders and members of the community. Formal education was comprised of carefully planned programs restricted to certain periods in the life of the individual. The traditional curricula contains the following elements: physical development, development of character, intellectual training, agriculture, trades and crafts, community development, and promotion of cultural heritage. The transfer of knowledge and skills in traditional African education was usually oral, however, there were areas where writing was used such as in the institutions of higher learning located in certain parts of Africa. As shown, a certain standard of education was achieved in Africa before the arrival of colonialists.

Since what is taught in African schools has become mainly foreign and adapted to the African context, teachers and curriculum specialists must know how effective the methods and content of curricula are to the culture and needs of the people (Salia-Bao, 1989). In some cases there is a call for instructional materials, settings, and systems that would relate more closely to traditional African principles of education. In recent years more attention has been given to local production of teaching materials including textbooks. This enables aspects of culture to be brought in versus the lack of local perspectives and cultural background found in imported books with respect to unrelated examples, photographs, and illustrations (Amukugo, 1993). These new qualities of materials enable teachers to frame the information learned in school in a way which is directly related to the students knowledge and experience. For any curriculum to be functional, it must be rooted in the needs and the culture of the people for which it is designed.

Curriculum Design

It is necessary for curriculum specialists who are not familiar with the region to conduct a situation analysis. The society should be studied according to the following measures: learning resources available in the society, values and attitudes in the society, needs and goals of the society, other learning systems parallel to the formal school system, and parallel programs in similar national contexts (Salia-Bao, 1989). Also, teachers' educational background and training and basic demographic and statistical information on school numbers and distribution, enrollments, and the student flow through the system should be investigated. When selecting methods and materials there are cultural expectations to keep in mind. These include what it means to learn and what constitutes learning materials. Culture and society based educational development enables new knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be introduced within the framework of existing knowledge, cultural patterns, institutions, values, and human resources. The challenge is to preserve the traditional education values and renew what must be renewed (Amukugo, 1993).

Elmore and Stykes (1985) explain that the most important decisions about what is taught in public school should be made by elected officials at the local level, because they are closest to the citizens, and understand the needs of the community. Educational administrators also have a large role in the process of change and educational reforms (Cohen, 1994). Curriculum has been said to be too important to be left to school teachers. However, teachers are the most direct agents in the learning process (Montero-Sieburth, 1992). There is a need for teachers practice and experience to be consciously integrated into the curriculum to create the kind of materials which are most relevant to his or her students' needs. For example, teachers in Africa are generally trained for an understanding of how to apply an adapted curriculum to the African situation, and the traditional pedagogy of learning by doing is adopted as much as possible (Amukugo, 1993). Another example,

is Naama Sabar and Nitsa Shafriri's work in Israel, using Decker Walker's naturalistic model of deliberation, consensus, and rationale in curriculum development (Montero-Sieburth, 1992). This model incorporates teacher initiatives into curriculum development, and its success is attributed to the teachers' opportunity to create materials at their own pace and with the help of experts.

The role of the teacher in curriculum development is always important because "the teacher serves as the interpreter of educational policy and because the teacher is the major mediator of what shall be taught...in the classroom" (Eisner, 1994). The Lesotho model is a strategy where the teacher is seen as the key person in the development of curriculum and is in partnership with other support systems (Rees, 1982). This strategy recognizes the importance of taking the teaching and learning conditions in a school into consideration before an attempt is made to bring about curricular change. Another type of teacher involvement can be illustrated by a pilot program in Papua New Guinea. This program was designed to promote curriculum change by having teachers design new courses based on certain guiding principles. The pilot program proved successful with respect to student achievement, and participating teachers developed increased competence in curriculum development and relevant pedagogic skills as their involvement in the project grew. Also, there was evidence that a teachers involvement in the curriculum development process reduced his or her resistance to change (Montero-Sieburth, 1992). The Papua New Guinea case shows support for school-centered innovation. I will introduce other cases in which curricula has been designed to meet the needs of the local community.

The Pakistani Case

The production of primary-level curriculum materials began in the Balochistan Province of Pakistan in the Spring of 1993. (Creative Associates International, Inc., 1994) The Balochistan Instructional Materials Development and Training Cell (BIMDTC) is responsible for the project. BIMDTC was created by the Primary Education Development

(PED) Program, which is funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the provincial government of Balochistan. BIMDTC is an excellent example of collaboration between local, government, and international forces, as well a case which strives for the incorporation of relevant content in curriculum. BIMDTC has always recognized and incorporated the needs of teachers, students, administrators, and parents into the existing educational objectives. In early 1992, the PED Program concluded that in order to impact educational practices in the province, new primary-level textbooks had to be produced. The reform plan was approved by both provincial and federal officials. The director of primary education said "BIMDTC is an excellent element that serves as a catalyst for change. It's real value will be realized as it becomes formally instituted in the entire school system" (Creative Associates International, Inc., 1994). The goal of BIMDTC is to provide necessary learning materials that are interesting and attractive, that facilitate teacher effectiveness, and that are relevant to the needs of the student, teachers, administrators, and parents. The materials are written by a group of adults who are most familiar with the needs of the students. The benefits of the program are seen in the positive attitudes toward change and a commitment to quality that is reflected onto the school children of Balochistan (Creative Associates International, Inc., 1994).

The Bangladeshi Case

The Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (GSS) is an NGO in Bangladesh which was established in 1983. The objective of GSS is to facilitate the process of social mobilization of the poor through literacy and education. However, in response to the need for primary education for the children of agricultural laborers and poor peasants in the low literacy villages, the Primary Education Program was established. This is a community rooted program that gives equal access to all poor children in a village and seeks to involve the community in the development of a child centered environment. The programs targets are that each child will be able to: produce creative written work and talk about it confidently;

have confidence in using basic math skill in their everyday life; have experienced a range of cultural activities in drama, art, and music; and have a better understanding of his or her physical and economic environment. The training of teachers for this program is a great achievement considering the lack of training prior to this project. They receive 3 days of basic training in GSS philosophy and then 10 days training in teaching. According to GSS, the most encouraging thing in the schools is the growing confidence in the methodology that GSS has made the center of its program. The methodology is derived from the most successful and progressive practices used in many Western primary school systems. Many of the teachers find it difficult to gain confidence in the methodology because they themselves have been educated through a more formal and didactic system. There has recently, however, been a full acceptance by the majority of teachers that the method really works. GSS also believes that in order for the curricular material to be effective and meaningful, the subject matter must be enjoyable and relevant. This is true for all learners and particularly for those without encouragement and support systems.

Bangladesh has shown recurrent in-service teacher training at the school level in other projects (Fordham, 1992). This training concentrates on topics such as practical methods of teaching major subjects, ways to adapt curriculum to the social and physical environment of the child, the understanding of how children develop and learn, methods for evaluating teaching and learning, the management of classrooms, and parent-teacher community relations. They are dedicated to meeting the needs of the community and adapting curricular content and methodology to the needs of the student.

Strategic Approaches to School Reform

The systemic school reform, as suggested by Marshall Smith and Jennifer O' Day (1990), is a strategy designed to provide "a system wide structure of educational goals and content within which all schools and districts might restructure to maximize the quality of their curriculum and instruction." Teachers and other local school professionals have the

responsibility of designing and implementing the curriculum and methodologies of instruction to best meet the needs of their particular students. The school becomes the basic unit of change, and school educators become initiators, designers, and directors of such efforts. The systemic school reform approach seeks to alter student outcomes by changing what happens at the most basic level of education, the classroom (Smith and O' Day, 1990). The teacher has a mastery of the subject matter of the curriculum and a variety of ways for implementing it. The particular visions of schools will differ depending on the local context. The curriculum is appropriate for the range of experiences, cultures, and learning styles of the student. To truly alter the curriculum and instruction in schools, the educational governance system must give local schools the resources, freedom, and authority to provide this high quality education for their students.

Another strategic approach to curricular reforms is the 'school clusters' innovation. School clusters can be defined as "a grouping of schools for administrative and educational purposes" (UNESCO, 1987). Most cluster schemes have evolved out of the context of Developing countries. Clusters can be vehicles for decentralization of educational administration and helpful to small schools. Clusters are grouped into economic, pedagogic, administrative, and political objectives.

A common cluster model has a 'core' or 'central' institution which is the leader of several 'satellite' institutions. The head of the core school coordinates the sharing of resources and staff development for the cluster. The main pedagogic purposes of cluster schemes is the encouragement of teacher development, promotion of curriculum development, evolvement of an environment for innovation, and encouragement of cooperation between schools. The political purposes include an increased community participation in decision making and reduced regional and social inequalities. These are often helpful for teacher training to meet the needs of new basic education reforms. The cluster-based training program, a decentralized form of training developed in Bangladesh, seeks to improve the effectiveness of classroom teachers (UNESCO, 1984). Clusters can

be easily supervised and the training provided is flexible to the needs of individual schools.

Conclusion

These strategies and case studies show ways in which local concerns can be addressed through the medium of education. Curriculum has been shaped to a large extent by worldwide standards and modern values. This type of curriculum has been shown to be irrelevant in some cases to student and community needs. To learn effectively students must relate to the material which they are learning. The consideration of whether the content of a curriculum is relevant and meaningful to students is an important aspect of curriculum development. This paper has explored ways in which curricula can be adapted to a region's specific social, political, and regional conditions.

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